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TAGS: PREL PHUM MARR ETTC CH NL EU

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/EU/CHINA: EU "CAUTIOUS" ON LIFTING
CHINA ARMS EMBARGO

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CLIFFORD SOBEL FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: According to Dutch FM Bot, the EU is moving "cautiously" with regard to the issue of lifting the China arms embargo. Although there is no strong opposition to lifting the embargo, several members feel more time is needed before making that decision. Bot would prefer not to have the embargo lifted during the Dutch presidency, but won't break consensus. An internal Dutch report of the ministers' meeting notes that supporters of a quick lift (France and Spain) have so far failed to make their case. It is possible that the EU-China summit currently scheduled for December 8 will be postponed, but the reasons are unclear. End Summary.

BOT: EU MOVING CAUTIOUSLY

¶2. (C) On October 12, Dutch Foreign Minister Bot provided Ambassador Sobel with a brief readout of the EU Foreign Ministers' lunch-time discussion of the China Arms Embargo during the October 11 GAERC in Luxembourg. According to Bot, "no one" in the EU doubts that the embargo will be lifted in time; it is only a question of "when." When the issue was raised at the lunch by French Minister-Delegate Clodie Haignere, Bot said, there were no strong statements of opposition to lifting the embargo at some point in the future, and he had to conclude that overall tendency toward lifting the embargo was "positive." Bot reportedly also concluded, however, that more work remained to be done to strengthen the Code of Conduct and the "Toolbox" before the EU would be prepared to lift the embargo.

¶3. (C) Bot confirmed that while the French and Spanish pushed to lift the embargo by the EU-China summit, others -- including Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Czech Republic, Italy, and the UK -- preferred to take a more cautious, go-slow approach. Bot reiterated that "if I had my way, it would not happen," but stressed that the Netherlands would not stand alone as president to break a consensus to lift. Bot made clear that he and British FM Straw are coordinating closely on how to handle the issue, although he told Ambassador Sobel that he worried that Straw's opposition to lifting the embargo may be "shifting." (Note: British Ambassador Colin Budd separately told Ambassador Sobel that Straw's position on the embargo has not changed, citing his statements at the December 2003 European Council meeting. Budd also reported that at the GAERC, some of the strongest arguments for going slowly were made by German Foreign Minister Fischer, who argued that the "prestige of our main ally (the U.S.)" should be seriously considered, and Commissioner Chris Patten, who suggested that the EU needed to "pause for thought" before moving forward.)

¶3. (C) With regard to human rights, Bot suggested that the EU had decided to downplay in public the connection between the embargo and the human rights situation in China. In private, however, the EU has suggested several specific steps the Chinese should take on the human rights front (freeing the remaining Tiananmen prisoners, for example). According to Karel Hartogh, FM Bot's private secretary, Bot made clear during the EU-Chinese ministerial in Hanoi that if China needed "more time" to deal with human rights concerns, then it should understand if the EU needed "more time" to feel comfortable lifting the embargo.

DUTCH BELIEVE MORE WORK TO BE DONE

¶4. (C) In a separate discussion with poloff, Paul van den IJssel (Director for Arms Transfers in the MFA's Security Department), shared elements of the internal Dutch report on the meeting. According to van den IJssel, the Dutch concluded: 1) a "clear majority" needs more time before making a decision to lift; 2) more work remains to be done on the Code of Conduct and "Toolbox," 3) there is still a need for positive steps on human rights from the Chinese, and 4) the supporters of a quick lift have not yet succeeded.

SUMMIT POSTPONED?

¶5. (C) Herman Schaper, Dutch Deputy POLDIR, and Hartogh separately told us that the Chinese Ambassador to the

Netherlands recently asked the MFA to consider alternative dates for the EU-China summit currently scheduled for December 8. While the Dutch have pushed back hard to hold the summit on December 8 as planned, they are quietly looking at other dates, including as late as December 21 (after the December 17 EU Council meeting). While no explicit link had been made to the arms embargo by the Chinese side, some in the MFA saw the request as a possible veiled threat.

(Schaper told DCM on October 12 that while a majority of EU members agree that the embargo decision should not be linked directly to the summit, a majority also appear sympathetic to the idea of using the summit to "hint" that a decision is not far off.) Hartogh, however, suggested that Beijing may want to avoid holding the summit too close to elections to the Taiwanese legislative Yuan (currently scheduled for December 11). Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui is scheduled to visit The Hague on October 14 and presumably will discuss preparations for the summit.

SOBEL